



THE WAY

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FROM THE SENIOR SCHOOL DIRECTOR OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Recently I spoke at the Graduation Assembly on the topic of 'effort'. I included the key parts of my message for this week's article.

In recent years, research has suggested that when we choose the path of least resistance, we're not necessarily being lazy—we're simply acting in line with how our brains are wired. Scientists argue that our brains operate like economists, conducting cost-benefit analyses before deciding whether to act. If the "cost to act" feels too high, it can bias our decision-making, making us less likely to do things. Understanding this can help us make better choices—both in what we pursue and what we avoid.

For example, if you find yourself constantly distracted by your phone while studying, place it at the other end of the house where it's difficult to reach. The extra effort required to retrieve it may be enough to keep you focused. Staying after school to complete your work before heading home may be easier than taking everything home, where distractions are plentiful. There's no guarantee these strategies will always work, but one thing is certain: we tend to take the easy route when it's available. So, becoming less lazy may simply come down to removing that option altogether.

In the classroom as students, it's easy to take shortcuts. If a teacher assigns questions, you might write as little as possible just to appear as though you've done the work. If you're asked to write a page, you might write half a page with oversized handwriting. If a teacher asks for responses, you might stay silent, letting others answer for you. If you don't understand something, you might

disengage entirely, tuning out by chatting with a friend, or copying someone else's work. When the results come in and they're not what you hoped for, it's easy to blame the teacher, the subject, or even convince yourself that you'll never be a "smart" student.

But here's the truth: learning is hard. Gaining new knowledge, committing it to memory, and applying it in assessments is challenging. At times, it can feel like driving through a thick fog—uncertain, frustrating, and stressful, unsure of whether you'll emerge on the other side.

But I want to encourage all of us to choose the path that requires more effort. That might mean asking your teacher or friends for help, reading the textbook carefully and working through examples, or watching videos on the topic and taking notes in your own words. Each time you persist, you will eventually break through the fog and reach a moment of clarity. You'll feel a sense of accomplishment, your brain will release happy endorphins, and you'll build resilience to keep going. Learning brings both joy and struggle, but it is through the struggle that real growth happens.

I want you all to struggle more—not in the sense of suffering, but in the sense of pushing through difficulties, making greater efforts, and truly engaging with your learning. Too often, we seek quick answers, but true understanding requires wrestling with ideas until they become clear. The temptation to give up, get distracted, or take shortcuts will never lead to deep learning.

When we persevere through struggle and achieve success, we prepare ourselves for a richer, more fulfilling life.

"All life demands struggle. Those who have everything given to them become lazy, selfish, and insensitive to the real values of life. The very striving and hard work that we so constantly try to avoid is the major building block in the person we are today."—Pope Paul VI

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